

Big Ten Football Media Conference

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Rosemont, Illinois, USA

Tony Petitti

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Commissioner Tony Petitti. Questions.

Q. Obviously we're in a different point now than we were when you took over your job. In the infancy of the CSC, how have you seen that evolving and developing (indiscernible)?

TONY PETITTI: First, what I'll say is Jay has done a great job. He's already contributing a lot. So much that's going on, our athletic directors meet on a weekly basis. Jay has been participating. He's obviously very experienced coming from tech. He's really well-regarded in the room.

The second piece, about the CSC, what I'll say is really it's an incredible collaboration among the four conferences. I worked with Bryan Seeley when I was at MLB. He was leading investigations there. I have a good experience working with Bryan, I've seen him, even though that area didn't report directly to me at MLB. So he's in a really challenging spot. In a perfect world, the settlement would have come a little sooner. We would have had more time to run up there.

In a lot of ways he's building a start-up, at the same time coaches, student-athletes, their representatives, our administrators, they need to understand the rules and start to operate. He's operating it as he's building it.

I just really applaud the efforts of the four leagues, their general counsels, the NCAA contributes as well. It's an ongoing process.

Literally before I came over here today, we were on for 90 minutes with Bryan. That's happening on a regular basis so we can help him get the experience because he's doing two really important things. Just building a start-up alone takes a lot of time. Hire up people, all that.

I think people just have to respect the process. I know there's some things that have been reported about the speed of deals, how things get cleared. Part of this is we want these deals to be scrutinized. All of the participants in the system want deals to be looked at fairly. That takes



some time when you're doing it for the first time.

I think Deloitte and setting up with the cap system, I think we feel really good. It's only going to improve over time. I think we have the right people. We have an incredible amount of resources that the conferences are putting in, both in terms of resources and people to support Bryan. I just think a little bit of patience.

But in fairness to coaches, they're doing this in real-time. Of course, they want answers quickly. Of course, they want to know what the rules are. It will take a little time. I'm very confident that we're off to a good start and it will get better.

Q. How much did you build in wiggle room based on potential legal challenges, just because it is so new?

TONY PETITTI: Yeah, the system's built to have its own adjudication process through arbitration. There really shouldn't be challenges outside the system. Plaintiff's lawyers have an opportunity to weigh in on some of the rules that we're making. There's that system. You make a rule. It does take time to have that process worked through. Once we're set, the system is built to really work through arbitration.

Q. Obviously a lot of continued talk and speculation with expansion. Reports a 76-team field is where sights are set at the moment. Where do you stand on that? Any movement from the Big Ten side of things?

TONY PETITTI: I think we've been supportive. There's a couple of pieces of it. The first is, like, when something like that gets talked about, our process is we want to know what our coaches think, we want to know what the ADs think. Anything I do in the conference office is to represent the relevant groups depending on the topic. We talk to coaches.

Clearly I think part of motivation from the NCAA is recognition that with these larger conferences, you're going to force teams to more closer than .500 records in a conference, what access to they have.

So I think overall, with the system we have now with these large conferences, more access is better. That's the first piece. We're very supportive of that. I think obviously

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there's the economic piece that the NCAA runs. We don't do that directly.

The second piece of it is, once you expand the field, what are you doing in terms of how you seed it? What is the right way to absorb those additional teams? Are we straight seeding? Who plays in the play-in rounds?

I think we have some opinions that might be slightly different. I think obviously we're biased. We think our teams will be seeded higher as the field goes in. There's a system we have now, it will probably continue is my understanding.

You weigh all of it and say, Okay, maybe the seeding isn't perfect in the way we would design it, but it's providing more access. I think we tilt to the side that access is more important, as many teams competing for as long as possible for the right reward is the best place to be. We're generally supportive.

Q. How would you design seeding?

TONY PETITTI: I would like it to be just straight seeding, right across. The teams that are in the early games are the teams that are seeded. I understand why that might impact the value of what's happening for a broadcast partner, CBS and WBD. They may feel different about that. That's up to Dan Gavitt. A lot of trust among the administrators and coaches and Dan to make sure. I think there's a lot of faith in what he does.

Q. It's been reported that the conference is exploring some options of private equity. When you look at different resources of revenue generation, to what extent do you bring your television partners in on that? I don't know if the word is 'collaborative' but at least make them feel they are in the room?

TONY PETITTI: Look, I think it's been reported that we're considering looking at sort of modernizing the conference, potentially doing some things differently. Whether or not we decide to take strategic investment, doing that is what we're considering with the goal of continuing to grow, opportunities for student-athletes and all that.

Look, we have really valuable partners. In this particular instance, there are many times where we talk to our TV partners. I think this is an area where, yeah, there's awareness.

It's not like really in this structure that we're talking about, it's not really necessary to have ongoing conversations. If we're going to do something different, we're going to respect everything we've set up in our current deals.

There's nothing being contemplated that would change anything in our current media relationships.

Some of them roll off at different times. No contemplation of doing anything different. This project, if we decide to do it, doesn't require any changes to our media structure at all.

Q. What kind of role, if any, do you see private capital, equity in college athletics?

TONY PETITTI: Look, I look at it more broadly than that. What I would say is the responsibility in the office I feel as commissioner is to maximize the resources for our member institutions.

We're among the highest sports sponsorship league in the country. We have the most student-athletes given the size of the league, the fact we have 28 championships. We have many institutions that sponsor more than the 28 championships that we sponsor.

I think in a world that's changed like it has with the settlement and revenue share, the obligation in the conference office is to make sure we're resourced properly. That largely has been media deals, sponsorship, all of those things. Setting up a structure that can maximize that activity is important.

Whether or not we need strategic investment to help us, we'll determine. It will be done by all 18 leaders. I think it's no different than looking at the other buckets that we have to maximize resources. Just one other avenue that may or may not be available to us.

Q. There are now two competing Congressional actions that are being considered to change the way college athletics are done. Where does the conference stand on those two? Do you support one, not the other...

TONY PETITTI: We've spent I would say virtually all of our time supporting the SCORE Act, going down and making our staff available to members of Congress. I've been down I think since I've gotten the job north of 15 times to DC. I've been fortunate that members of Congress give us time when we go down there to talk about it. There's a lot of members that are spending a lot of time on college athletics, which we greatly appreciate. Those conversations continue.

I think our position, the SCORE Act does a lot of what we need, which is basically enshrining the settlement. When I first started going down when I got the job, before settlement, it felt like we were kind of asking for more help. I think once we decided to settle, we set up this model



where we're rev sharing, still NIL. I think it changed the tone in terms of we're not asking, we're looking.

You asked us to change. You expected us to modernize our system. The settlement does that. We'd like to protect it so we can actually operate it. It doesn't mean it won't get tweaked over time, but we'd like the opportunity to operate this system. The SCORE Act does all of these things. I think that's a really important piece.

I guess it's the recent act that Senator Cantwell proposed, we haven't spent a lot of time on. I guess like most things there's elements that make a lot of sense. There might not be everything in that bill where we're currently thinking. We feel like the SCORE Act is enough.

We're trying to make sure we're asking for a limited ask in Congress. It's largely around enshrining the settlement for as long as possible. The ability to make some rules, we understand what eligibility is, all those things are important to protect it.

It's because we modernized it. I think it's changed the nature of it. I feel like we have momentum and we'll just keep pushing. I think you'll find virtually unanimity in the space that the SCORE Act can do a lot of things that we need to take this new system and protect it and actually operate it before it gets challenged all over the place.

Q. (No microphone.)

TONY PETITTI: That's a great question.

I would say we probably still need even a second season of understanding what the schedule is and how it actually operates.

I think I learned this from sort of two halves of the career I had. Like on the broadcast side, I was sort of the TV guy pushing for scheduling that worked for TV. Basically making sure that we respect the broadcast process to make sure we're maximizing audiences, which is in the interest of all of our schools.

Secondly, I think our travel, the way we're configured requires us to constantly study what happens. I think after this season, we'll know. We've talked about inside the league with our coaches continuing to bring more resources to scheduling. There's so much technology now. A place where AI can really help you.

I think the way you think about it is how many factors are you including in your schedule? What do you need? How much time in between games when you're on the road? Those are things that coaches help us decide.

Then there's the other side of it: What is the best competitive balance. What have you learned? Studying the record and performance, what happens when teams go in either direction? How do they perform? Are we seeing a trend where it's becoming more difficult to win with a certain time slot? That's on us to figure that out. The sample size isn't big enough yet after one season. I think this year will help us.

I've always been a believer that the schedule thing, I always use the word it's a 'living thing'. We should be constantly evaluating it across... Whether or not we have west coast teams, we should be doing that. The west coast has added some other factors we should consider about how teams perform when they travel.

Q. With the Big Ten tournament expanding to 18 teams, how much are you looking forward to that?

TONY PETITTI: I would say it's just talking with our coaches. We try to do a good job of bringing our coaching groups together to sort of get their opinion.

I think they felt pretty strongly last year that everybody should have an opportunity to go. They thought that was the best position. Part of also, when you think about how you position your conference tournament, is what impact does it have on how you qualify for the NCAA. How are you handling the top seeds in your league? What are you asking them to do? Are you providing opportunities?

I think there might have been one or two teams last year that felt they were here, got on a run, they may have increased their chances to go to the bubble and get in. When you expand the field, that will be relevant also to have more.

We really felt that the coaches felt strongly, our athletic directors agreed to let the coaches' opinion really carry the day. We did it one way last year. We'll be all comers this year and we'll evaluate it after. Really it was driven by our coaches.

Q. In the revenue sharing model, have you considered sports-specific caps?

TONY PETITTI: Yeah, we haven't. I want to make sure I don't address the legal aspect of whether you can actually do that.

We talked about in the league how you structure these payments. I think where we ended up in the Big Ten, I think probably others, I don't want to speak for other conferences, we didn't decide to have minimums or



allocations partly because we really feel like this should be local decision making.

If you really think about the decision tree, the first thing is does an institution get to the cap, right? It's not mandatory to get to the top. That's the first thing. Secondly, what sports does the institution want to support? What athletes get something? How many scholarships do you want to have? Do you get to the roster limits? How do you run it?

I think the best place to be is local. Another thing interesting about the Big Ten, when you think about it on the men's side, there's not like a clear third sport in our league, right? If you're sitting in certain places, it could be wrestling, certain places it might be hockey, out west might be rowing, right? It's a different configuration of the league.

When you start thinking about how do you allocate, we talked about it initially when this first happened, had all the ADs in the room, what should we think about this, how do we support that.

The answer is we're going to let you run your programs. We have schools that have 36 sports. We have some that are in the low 20s. Letting them make that decision we thought is best. Let them manage what they do.

It's not all the same. On the women's side it's clear with basketball and volleyball. You'll see it more across. It was really like after a lot of discussion, the collective pretty much unanimous consensus was, hey, you manage your stuff locally. We'll support you in the conference office, but you make these decisions locally.

Q. Seems there's been a pretty consistent legal challenge to eligibility, the five-year clock, four seasons of competition. Does the Big Ten have a position on the future of eligibility?

TONY PETITTI: Look, there were things done prior to this system about playing four games, redshirting after four, that were done probably when you layered in rev share on top. A structure of redshirting three, four, five years ago motivated by player development. Now when you layer rev share on top of it, maybe that system doesn't work anymore.

To say we really want to do a lot of work on five for five as a league. We need our colleagues to want to do the same thing. So it's going to take time.

Unfortunately it's being done. When you do that work, you're doing it with a lot of eligibility cases all around the country. Some being upheld, some not. I think the waiver process complicates a lot of things. We have to do a lot

more work there.

I do think the recognition at the beginning is, like, what does this system require you to change, because it's very different than what it was, speaking towards football right now, which is not what we're here to talk about, but that's right on top of us, what's been happening. That's why coaches are talking about a change because they're seeing an impact with the four-game redshirt with the compensation system.

That's part of the challenge we'll hopefully get better at is understanding what things we created in the past can't be pushed forward anymore because of the new model.

Q. The tipoff and kickoff times with TV, particularly the east to west, west to east, how much conversation do you have with TV partners? The broad-based programming within the Big Ten now, the sports numbers requirements, is that something that could change now in this model?

TONY PETITTI: The first part, there aren't guardrails about how many times we ask teams to do the two examples, in terms of the impact of that. It's a necessary thing.

Look, we kind of move through the day in our schedule from what FOX has built at big noon, going into CBS late in the afternoon, then prime with NBC, then you have BTN throughout the day.

It gets back to the question I was asked before, looking at the metrics. What's happened to the success rate? Not a lot of data about it. I hear from coaches about it. They want to weigh in, when we play, our body clocks, all those things are important.

This is what I mean about bringing more firepower to our scheduling so that we can actually look at more metrics when we build schedules, create more schedules more quickly, decide what factors are more important, and those types of things. How often you're asked to do that, how many times you play a team coming off a bye.

I think overall we're putting a lot of resources in. It will be the same for basketball. Getting better at that. I think our configuration requires us to put more resources into that. I would say we're learning from it. Obviously you're balancing your media partners, who are really important in terms of the source of revenue that we get. We have to be respectful of that.

It's part of a new challenge in the Big Ten based on the expansion we did.



Q. The sports requirement numbers to be a member of the Big Ten, is that something that might change?

TONY PETITTI: No, I think what we've been really consistent about and what you've seen from our institutions is I can tell you scholarships are up since the settlement, significantly for women athletes in the Big Ten. We have a good chance for that to continue to grow.

I think at its heart, the thing that the Big Ten is going to be a high-sports sponsorship league. That's what our ADs are committed to, that's what our presidents are committed to, that's what we want to do, continue to maintain. We're constantly looking at ways where we can provide more resources because that is a fundamental part of what the Big Ten is.

Q. I've heard there is some suggestion that moving forward, the \$2.5 million, adding scholarships could be removed, the idea being departments would be able to push more scholarship dollars to non-revenue sports.

TONY PETITTI: Without giving an indication, it's too early to give an indication on how that will go.

I will say you are accurate that we are discussing that. What would that unlock if that was a change we made to the settlement? It is part of the settlement. It is not a simple process to make a change like that right now, especially because the settlement is just a few months old.

There is a lot of talk about what is the best way to be structured.

In fairness to everybody, when you're making decisions about all of this, we were doing it in real-time. Then what happens is practitioners come in and they start to operate and things become more obvious that maybe when attorneys and all of us were trying to build the system, we didn't quite have line of sight to. I think this is one area that we've kind of seen.

I think the sentiment is changing. Now how do we build consensus? Is it the right change and when? I think there will be more to come on that.

Thank you, guys. Good to see everybody.

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